



Virtual Collaboration: Cool Tools to Help Volunteers Get Things Done

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Cool Tools for Communicating With Your Team

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You have a dozen team members scattered across the globe working on an important project with a strict deadline. *So what?* Bringing stakeholders together to work on and complete projects is a commonplace responsibility for today's managers. Savvy executives constantly look for new ways to employ technology to accelerate and facilitate the process of collaboratively drafting documents, establishing consensus, and accomplishing projects. The latest services you need to facilitate collaboration between the parties and keep yourself abreast of their progress were virtually unheard of ten years ago, and were, financially speaking, out of reach for small and medium sized businesses like associations up until recently. Today, a new generation of web services provide inexpensive, and even free, online collaboration solutions.

How should you go about selecting an online collaboration tool? Taking time to carefully choose the right online collaboration tools for you and your team is time well spent. Take some time to experiment with a few products before making a decision. An entire project can be ruined if your team doesn't understand how to use the tool, or revolts against it. And if you get frustrated with the tool halfway through the project, you'll become less productive and slow down the work.

1. Consider your team's technical acumen. Does the tool you're considering require the user to download and install software on their computer? Remember that at some companies, and even at your own company, there may be IT policies against installing any software on company-issued computers unless they have been pre-approved by IT. This is especially true at companies or organizations that house sensitive records (i.e. banks, government agencies, insurance companies, etc.). Are you thinking about using a tool that requires an ActiveX, Java or Flash plug-in installation? Novice Internet users may be easily alarmed or confused whenever alerted to a plug-in download.

2. Consider your team's willingness to learn. Some people are more comfortable than others when faced with unfamiliar circumstances. Fortunately, many of the newest web services for online collaboration require only a few details to set up an account and many are also focused on simplicity as a strategy. As a result of this simplicity strategy, many bells and whistles you have come to expect in desktop software are deliberately left out of online collaboration tools. Most of these tools do just enough to satisfy 90% of prospective users.

3. Consider the tool's accessibility. This is important for both you and your collaborators. Getting your team to interact with the tool is essential if you are to gain broad collaboration. Do you have to login every time you visit, or does the tool employ cookies to remember users? Do you need a high-speed connection to use the tool? If yes, will this be a problem for anyone you're working with? Is it mobile-friendly? Mobile phones are becoming pervasive computing devices; your team may expect to be able to access the collaboration tool from the airport or taxi. Are there multiple ways to engage with the tool? Instead of logging in anytime I want to post something, can I send an email to an address defined by the tool that allows me to do so? At least 15% of web users surf with something other than Microsoft Internet Explorer. This begs the question: Does your tool work in Firefox, Opera and/or in a Mac environment?

4. Consider your notification and administrator preferences. Are you an RSS user? Are your team members? Do you prefer activity notifications via email? Do you want administrator rights to revert changes and enforce group rules, or is your group capable of self-moderation?

5. Consider your budget. Determine if you can afford to pay for some of the features that allow you to brand the online collaboration tool, increase your usage or storage, share the tool with other s more people, etc. Chances are, you *can* afford it.

Checklist: 27 Cool Collaboration Tools

Surveys & Online forms

- www.wufoo.com
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- www.surveymonkey.com
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- www.poll daddy.com
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Meeting arrangement

- www.ikordo.com
- [Time zone converter](http://www.timezoneconverter.com)
- www.setameeting.com
- www.meetingwizard.com
-
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Project management

- www.basecamp.com
- www.intranets.com
- www.goplan.info
-
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Synchronous collaboration

- www.meebo.com
- www.skype.com
- www.vyew.com

Asynchronous collaboration

- [Google Groups](http://www.google.com/groups)
- www.pbwiki.com
- www.wetpaint.com
- www.writeboard.com
-
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A/synchronous collaboration

- [Google Docs & Spreadsheets](http://www.google.com/docs)
- www.zoho.com
- www.campfirenow.com

Browser toolbars

- www.conduit.com
- [VMN Toolbar](http://www.vmn.com)

Other cool stuff

- ❑ del.icio.us
- ❑ www.twitter.com
- ❑ www.facebook.com
- ❑ www.msgme.com
- ❑ www.tokbox.com
- ❑
- ❑